

SIR WALTER SCOTT'S LAUDANUM?

by

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THE VICISSITUDES, MEDICAL and financial, of Sir Walter Scott have received much consideration by students of his wonderful life and all scraps of information are eagerly snapped up.

An unexpected find was made by Mr. Arnold Innes, a member of the Court of Patrons of this College, in his home at Earlsferry in Fife. In the attic he discovered the Day-book for 1823, 1824 and 1825 of Charles Bayley, Chemist, of 63 Princes Street, Edinburgh, and on its 34 pages were recorded the bills for goods delivered from his shop. He had a fashionable clientele in Edinburgh, which included Sir John Hope, a well-known

27		1824
Lady Scott		
2 Bottles Laudanum	2/6	1 5
1 Bottle Castor Oil		9
1 Bottle Opium		2 9
Basket 26 books	2	2 8
27		1 10 5

A page from the Day-book, showing one of the prescriptions for Lady Scott.

soldier, and Sir Walter Scott. One bill which was for £21 10s. 8½d. for replenishing a ship's medicine chest for Captain Duncan at Leith would interest the naval historian.

The enormous quantities of laudanum ordered for the Scotts between 1823 and 1825 amounted to 22 quarts, and in addition 18 dozen opium pills and lozenges. With each quart of laudanum was ordered a pint of castor oil, which seems logical. The dose of opium works out at about a pint every fortnight (six grains of morphine per day) which could suggest addiction in one or both of the Scotts.

Scott, it is well known, suffered severely from biliary colic with jaundice, but this had ceased four years before the Day-book of Bayley commenced. It was known that he took large quantities of laudanum for his colic, but it is doubtful that he continued with this medicine after his lyrical description of his cure by the use of calomel in 1819. A study of his works reveals one story, that of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which John Buchan

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regarded as the product of his opium dreams, as was Kubla Khan the work of Coleridge, who took laudanum from the day he left school till he died. He did not write other books of the quality of *The Bride*, so is it possible that Lady Scott, who was a chronic asthmatic and refused all medical attention, was quietly treating herself in the way she thought best after Scott had given up his laudanum?

The Day-book of Charles Bayley has been generously given to the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England by Mr. Arnold Innes and will thus be safely preserved for all time and will, I am sure, be consulted by historians from time to time in the future as it is a find of the greatest value.

COLLEGE PUBLICATIONS

READERS ARE REMINDED that the following publications issued or sponsored by the College may be obtained from the Editorial Secretary, Royal College of Surgeons of England, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C.2.

A Catalogue of the Portraits and other Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture in the College. By William Le Fanu, Librarian. 184 pages with 4 coloured and 52 black and white plates. £1 10s. 0d. (postage 1s. 9d.).

The History of the College. By Sir Zachary Cope, F.R.C.S. 376 pages, fully illustrated. £3 3s. 0d. (plus 2s. postage).

Lives of the Fellows, 1930-1951. By the late Sir D'Arcy Power, K.B.E., F.R.C.S., Honorary Librarian, and continued by W. R. Le Fanu, M.A., Librarian. A single volume, bound in blue cloth, of 889 pages, containing the Lives of all Fellows known to have died between 1930 and 1951. £2 2s. 0d. post free.

A Record of the Years from 1901 to 1950. Edited by Sir Ernest Finch, M.D., M.S., F.R.C.S. A slim volume, illustrated, containing a brief history of the College between the centenary and the 150th anniversary of the foundation with lives of all the Presidents since 1900, written by special contributors from their personal knowledge. In red cloth 9s. post free or red paper covers 5s. 6d. post free.

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